

Part 4 Bikaner to Pushkar

After two nights in Bikaner we headed south towards Pushkar where we were to enjoy the activities surrounding the annual camel and cattle fair. On the way we spent 30 minutes visiting one of the most unusual but popular holy shrines in India - Karni Mata Temple. In this temple rats are treated as sacred and given protection. If a rat is killed it must be replaced by one made of solid gold. Sighting a white rat amongst the hordes of black ones is considered especially auspicious, but sadly no-one saw one!



The Karni Mata Temple



Feeding some of the free ranging rats!

The world's largest cattle and camel fair at Pushkar is considered a highlight in India. It is held over ten days leading up to the full moon in the holy month of Kartika, which like our Easter, moves around a bit. This year the full moon was on November 27th. The normal population is around 20,000 but every year some 200,000 people and as many as 50,000 camels and cattle converge on the area. The camels are not only sold, but are decorated and raced. There is a huge trading area of stalls selling equipment for camels, and agricultural goods for the mostly rural people who come to buy and sell. There are also lots of stalls selling souvenirs to the many tourists like ourselves, who come to gawk. At the same time the day of the full moon is a holy day and Pushkar is one of the holiest cities in India for Hindus, with many people coming to immerse themselves in the lake and be blessed by the priests. We spent five hours roaming around getting lots of shots of colourful turbans and examples of regional dress from far and wide.



A decorated camel



Some colourful local ladies looking for a bargain





Bill being licked and followed by an amorous cow!



Sun setting over Pushkar

On the day following the full moon, we travelled for five hours by coach to Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan. On the way we had to wait at a railway crossing for a passenger train to pass. There was no station at the crossing but there were probably 50 - 60 people waiting. The train had to stop so that the guard could get out and change the points and that was the signal for all these people to storm the train and try to get on board. However, it was already loaded to the rafters and there were a number of young men illegally train surfing on the roof with no visible means of support. When they saw us gawking and taking photos of them, they started hooting and hollering, waving and dancing, even when the train started picking up speedscary!



People running for the train as it slows to a stop.



No more room it appears to us.



Waving and cheering as they move off



Full to the last of about twenty carriages!

Now with a population of 4 million, Jaipur was built back in 1727 when the then Maharajah decided to move from the Amber Fort palace 11km to the north down onto the plains. He created India's first planned city with the streets laid out in a grid system within high city walls. One hundred and fifty years later the then Maharajah had the entire old city painted pink, a colour associated with hospitality, to welcome the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII. This tradition has not only been maintained, but is strictly enforced by the local council, with building owners being fined if the colour of the building is not kept up. The 'pink' is really more of a terracotta colour made from crushed local bricks.



Our hotel in Jaipur



Entertainment over dinner in the roof top restaurant